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RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR D-LEW, SCA/FO, S/SRAP, AND EEB/BTA
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E.O. 12958 N/A
TAGS: [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [EFIN](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: AF-PAK BORDER GLITCH ENDANGERS ISAF CONVOY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A customs dispute August 30 at the Cheesh Chaman border crossing (on the Kandahar-Quetta route) halted traffic in both directions, including stalling Coalition supply trucks and exposing them to insurgent fire. Approximately twenty cargo trucks and three to four fuel tankers were damaged or destroyed. Officials also discovered an IED on a tanker and a Pakistani Frontier Corps bomb disposal unit defused the device. By 13:30, August 31, the border was reopened. According to GIROA sources, the customs dispute appears to have been provoked by Pakistan border officers who solicited bribes from Afghan truckers. The incident reinforces the continued need for capacity building and transparency in border and customs operations as well as an effective bilateral transit trade agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Working with our GIROA contacts at the Ministry of Finance, Directorate General for Customs, Afghan Border Police and others, Embassy officials pieced together the scenario of events which unfolded at the Weesh Chaman border crossing on Sunday and Monday, August 30-31, 2009. Weesh Chaman is located on the Pakistan side of the border along the principle transit corridor between Kandahar, Afghanistan and Quetta, Pakistan.

¶3. (SBU) According to Afghan government officials, Pakistani border officials/customs agents (not entirely clear whether it was one group or both) demanded bribes from Afghan truckers carrying fruit across the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan. The majority of the fruit was destined for India, except for melons destined for Quetta. In lieu of cash payments, the officials demanded the entire cargo be off-loaded for inspection. Afghan truckers protested the off-loading fearing the fruit would spoil and staged a blockade. The Afghan border officials subsequently retaliated by shutting down the border to Pakistani trucks.

¶4. (SBU) The resulting stoppage caused traffic to become backed up in both directions on Sunday, August 30. Coalition forces supply trucks were caught in the line of stalled traffic in Pakistan and were fired upon by insurgents and/or criminal agents. Approximately twenty cargo trucks and three to four fuel tankers were damaged or destroyed. Officials also discovered an IED on a tanker at the Chaman border area and Frontier Corps bomb disposal personnel defused the device. By 13:30, August 31, the border was reopened and operating in both directions.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy Kabul BMTF and Embassy Islamabad had previously worked together on a solution to provide technical training to the Pakistanis on how to use the Canadian provided truck scanner in Chaman. BMTF personnel are planning an immediate visit to Weesh Chaman with the Afghan Border Police's (ABP) Director of Operations to gain first hand situational awareness and to coordinate with ISAF on enforcement operation to x-ray and examine all fuel tankers entering at Weesh Chaman.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The incident added a security component to a long-standing economic dispute. If GIROA's bribery allegations are true, and they have been corroborated in the past, additional shakedowns of Afghan truckers occurring before the next round of negotiations of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement

(APTTA) could prove to be a serious irritant. They will also strengthen the GIROA's resolve to conclude a transparent and implementable transit trade agreement that precludes such events in the future. End comment.

EIKENBERRY